

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 OMB-01 AID-20

DRC-01 /176 W

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R 100935Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3755

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

USMISSION USUN

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 12290

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, PIN, CB

SUBJ: REPORTS OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES BY STUDENTS AND
UNEMPLOYED JOURNALISTS

1. SUMMARY. A NUMBER OF RUMORS HAVE CIRCULATED DURING THE PAST FEW DAYS THAT STUDENTS AND UNEMPLOYED JOURNALISTS ARE PLANNING AN ORGANIZED ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NOT DOUBT THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF STUDENTS ARE HIGHLY DISSATISFIED WITH THE PRESENT ECONOMIC SITUATION, OUR SOUNDINGS OF PRINCIPAL STUDENT LEADERS INDICATE THAT THEY HAVE NOT YET FORMULATED ACTION PLANS. THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT THE NEW STUDENT LEADERSHIP WHICH WILL BE ELECTED FOLLOWING THE RETURN TO CLASSES NEXT WEEK WILL BE MORE ACTIVIST, HOWEVER. TO DATE THE ONLY AGITATION OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE WAS AN ABORTIVE MOVE BY JOURNALISTS TO PUBLISH SPECIAL EDITIONS OF PRIVATE NEWSPAPERS IN VIOLATION OF THE GOVERNMENT BAN.

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END SUMMARY.

2. A NUMBER OF KHMER SOURCES, INCLUDING NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL CHIEF BG EK PROEUNG AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY VICE PRESIDENT PAN SOTHY, HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN TO US RECENTLY THAT STUDENTS ARE PLANNING ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES. SOME OF THE REPORTS, INCLUDING THAT OF EK PROEUNG, HAVE LINKED STUDENT UNREST WITH A POSSIBLE DEMONSTRATION BY KHMER JOURNALISTS WHO HAVE BEEN UNEMPLOYED SINCE PRIVATE NEWSPAPERS WERE BANNED IN MARCH OF THIS YEAR.

3. OUR CONTACTS WITH SEVERAL STUDENT LEADERS (KHMER STUDENT ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT IN HOEUNG, FACULTY OF LETTERS PRESIDENT SIT LY, AND FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE PRESIDENT KHAY MATOURY) AND OTHER KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES PROVIDE NO EVIDENCE THAT SIGNIFICANT ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY BY STUDENTS IS IMMINENT. ALTHOUGH VIRTUALLY ALL STUDENT LEADERS ESPRESSED STRONG DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, CITING IN PARTICULAR ITS FAILURE TO DEAL WITH ALLEGED ABUSES IN THE RICE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, TRAFFICKING WITH THE ENEMY, SMUGGLING, AND CORRUPTION, THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE ANY PLANS FOR ACTION. IN HOEUNG HAS CALLED A MEETING OF THE KHMER STUDENT ASSOCIATION CENTRAL COMMITTEE (WHICH IS COMPOSED OF THE STUDENT LEADERS FROM ALL FACULTIES) FOR SUNDAY NOVEMBER 11, BUT HE CLAIMS THIS IS PRINCIPALLY TO INAUGURATE A NEW ASSOCIATION OFFICE AND PROVIDE AN OCCASION FOR EXCHANGING VIEW AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF INACTIVITY.

4. TOMMORROW'S MEETING MAY, OF COURSE, CATALYZE INCREASED STUDENT ACTIVITY, BUT THE FEELING OF MANY INFORMED PERSONS, INCLUDING STUDENT LEADERS, IS THAT THERE IS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF SIGNIFICANT AGITATION FOR AT LEAST SEVERAL MONTHS. UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DO NOT RETURN TO

CLASSES UNTIL MID-NOVEMBER AND THIS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A PERIOD OF REGROUPMENT AND REORGANIZATION AS STUDENTS RENEW THEIR ACQUAINTANCES WITH EACH OTHER AND ELECT NEW LEADERS, FIRST AT THE FACULTY AND THEN AT THE KHMER STUDENT ASSOCIATION LEVEL. THERE ARE PREDICATIONS THAT, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE THAI EXAMPLE, THIS YEAR'S NEW
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LEADERSHIP WILL BE MORE RADICAL AND ACTIVIST THAN IN THE PAST. AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, THIS IS PURE SPECULATION AND NO ONE, INCLUDING THE CURRENT STUDENT LEADERS, HAS A VERY CLEAR IDEA OF JUST WHO THE NEW LEADERS WILL BE AND WHAT DIRECTIONS THEY WILL TAKE.

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5. SEVERAL RUMORS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT STUDENTS AT THE FACULTIES OF LETTERS AND LAW MAY BE ORGANIZING ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES ON THEIR OWN APART FROM THE KHMER STUDENT ASSOCIATION. STUDENT LEADERS TELL US THAT THERE ARE SOME PLANS OF THIS SORT BY A GROUP OF TEACHERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS WHO ARE ALSO PART TIME STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF LETTERS. THE LEADER OF THIS MOVEMENT IS REPORTEDLY A LYCEE TEACHER NAMED LOCH SOEUN, WHO HAS A REPUTATION AS A RADICAL LEADER AND WAS ARRESTED FOLLOWING THE EVENTS OF MARCH 1973. KHMER STUDENT ASSOCIATION LEADER-43 NOT WELL INFORMED ON THE DETAILS OF HIS GROUP'S ACTIVITIES BUT DOUBT THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT THE SUPPORT OF "PURE" STUDENTS. WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO VERIFY REPORTS OF PLANNED AGITATION BY LAW STUDENTS, WHOSE PRINCIPAL LEADERS LEFT TO STUDY IN FRANCE ABOUT ONE MONTH AGO.

6. ACTIVITIES OF UNEMPLOYED JOURNALISTS APPEAR TO HAVE

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BEEN CONFINED TO AN ABORTIVE EFFORT TO PUBLISH SPECIAL EDITIONS OF OUR OR FIVE OF THE BANNED NEWSPAPERS ON NOVEMBER 3 TO EXPRESS DISSATISFACTION WITH THE REFUSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW PRIVATE PAPERS TO REOPEN. SOME OF THE JOURNALISTS, HOWEVER, REPORTEDLY OPPOSED TAKING ANY ACTION UNTIL AFTER THE QUESTION OF KHMER REPRESENTATION AT THE UN HAS BEEN SETTLED AND AS A RESULT OF PROJECT WAS ABANDONED.

7. COMMENT: WHILE THE CHANCES OF SIGNIFICANT ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY BY STUDENTS IN THE NEAR FUTURE APPEAR SLIGHT, THE PROSPECTS OVER THE LONGER TERM GIVE REASON FOR CONCERN. INFLATION AND RICE DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED DISCONTENT NOT ONLY AMONG THE STUDENTS BUT AMONG CIVIL SERVANTS AND TEACHERS, WHO FORMED THE BACKBONE OF THE LAST ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATION. THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE HAS BEEN SEIZED WITH THE PROBLEM AND IS UNDERTAKING CRASH STUDIES TO FIND WAYS TO REDUCE SOURCES OF DISSATISFACTION.
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